Ethnohistory Field School Report 2017

Revival of Stó:lõ Art: 1970's to Present Day

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Chances are, if you asked someone to explain Coast Salish art, they would describe the dramatic, red and black carvings of northern Indigenous artists– perhaps the work of Bill Reid, Mungo Martin, or Beau Dick – or they would just say "animals" and leave it there. Many earlier books and papers discussing Indigenous art of the Pacific northwest lump every Indigenous group, from the border of Alaska down to the Puget Sound under the banner of the artistic style that belongs to northern peoples – some theories for why this is will be discussed further along.[1] Since the 1970s, there has been an active rediscovery of traditional art and craft amongst the Coast Salish groups, as well as a growing movement of individual and communal interpretation and revival of these traditional styles. This paper responds to the question "What is Stó:lõ art."

The Stó:lõ people of the Fraser River in southern British Columbia belong to the Halq'méylem linguistic group which extends from the top of the Salish Sea down to Puget Sound, part of a group that anthropologists call Central Coast Salish.[2] I will explore a history of Central Coast Salish art with a particular focus on Stó:lõ art: its revival, and current practices and conversations about it. I aim to peer beyond the pageantry into the privacy of the southern Coast Salish people. My sources are arranged in a dialogue between current, practicing Stó:lõ artists of different ages and at different points in their respective careers, and non-Indigenous writers – anthropologists, historians, curators – who have explored this topic, from Franz Boas in the late 19th century, to present day academics. In their own work, my sources have engaged in a (not always equal) reciprocal relationship of their own – giving and taking from each other, and it is my hope that this work gives as much as it has received from the work and words of others.

[1] lessLIE (Leslie Robert Sam) is working on a Master's thesis at the University of Victoria looking at bias in representation of Coast Salish art in literature. This will be a much-appreciated addition to the study of Coast Salish art.

[2] For an in-depth ethnohistory of the Stó:lõ, I recommend Keith Thor Carlson's essential book *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time*. *Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (2012).

First of all, I write from the perspective of a trained painter who knows the joy, the desire, to create art. I am also a graduate student in History and an ethnohistorian-in-training. During the process of collecting materials, sources, and voices for this paper, I found that these two identities often sat at odds with each other: I use my own artistic practice to pull me out of time and space and here I was trying to fit Stó:lõ art *into* time and space. In a way, I felt I was examining something spiritual and trying to make it consumable. It rankled. My Stó:lõ informants were compassionate and inspiring, and I am immensely grateful to Jared Deck (Tzeachten), Bonny Graham (Skwah, English, Nanaimo), Stan Greene (Chehalis, Nimiipuu), Terry Horne (Yakweakwioose), Nikki LaRock (Yakweakwioose), Rocky LaRock (Chehalis), Carrielynn Victor (Cheam), and Laura Weelaylaq (Tzeachten, Wuikinuxv) for speaking honestly and openly about their art practice, showing me what this "revival" looks like on the ground, and puzzling through some difficult questions with me.[3]

I connected with the informants I interviewed in two ways: 1) some suggestions were provided by the Fieldschool coordinators, and 2) some were brought to my attention by word of mouth. My goal was to speak with artists from across the Stó:lõ community, in all stages of artistic practice, representing diverse approaches and using a wide variety of materials. My informants represent only a small sample of the picture of Stó:lõ art, but their contributions are informed and enlightening and move the conversation forward, as I am sure you will see below when you read their words.

I did not directly ask the artists whom I interviewed to comment on the things that I came across in my reading. I avoided this for a few reasons.[4] First of all, I wanted each artist to speak on their own

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[3] In a way I feel like the kid who shows up just in time for dinner and partakes without having to do any of the preparation. I heard over and over again in my interviews about the amount of work that went into the research process of each artist – going to museums, looking at library books, reaching out to elders and artists near and far for insight, seeking out teachers, listening, and practicing for hours to hone their skill and to find their own [Salish] style. The work they have done will leave a positive legacy for their community. I hope, also, that this project will serve as a mark of what Stó:lõ (central Coast Salish) is in this time.

[4] A potential error or gap that I have already identified in my approach is that I did not ask the artists that I interviewed to describe their research process. Which museums did they go to to research traditional methods and

terms – I did not want them to feel that they needed to align or deviate from what I had come across in academic or curatorial sources. In every case, I had one opportunity to speak with each artist, and in a few cases I had time limitations – I did not want to use that time to speak about what other people have written about Stó:lõ art. I chose instead to hear what they chose to say - often providing a question list or at least a broad outline of what I was looking into in advance of the interview, but nothing further. My thought was that I would later consider their words in relation to academic sources, allowing the dialogue between academic writing and oral histories to play out on its own, and allowing for opportunities to draw connections if I saw them.[5] Second of all, I was interested to see if the artists would list any non-Indigenous resources as inspirational in the development of their practice. I encountered two cases: 1) was the role that Oliver Wells played in the resurgence of Salish weaving, and 2) the influence of Bill Holm's book "Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form." I will discuss both further on. Third, I think that there is a gap between non-Indigenous writing on and critiquing of Stó:lõ art, and the on-the-ground practice of what it actually meant – the two did not seem to line up. [6]

Therefore, I will first examine writings and interpretations of Coast Salish art by non-Indigenous writers as the methods of analysis have changed over time and it is beneficial to both parties to track the change in writing over time. My primary focus will be on tracking the change through time of Stó:lõ art of southern British Columbia, how it fits into the wider Coast Salish art style, how it differs, where it has come from, and what it looks like today. For this project, I decided that scope was important,

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examples? Which books did they find particularly helpful in libraries? Did they agree or disagree with what they found in available literature? I assume that we have read many of the same sources, but I have not confirmed.

[5] There is definitely something lost in not having this conversation, specifically, the opportunity for each artist to respond to existing scholarship on their own terms. In hindsight, I think that having Sto:lo artists comment on, or perhaps even revise or provide an alternate perspective would push Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of Sto:lo, and Coast Salish art generally, forward. Perhaps this perspective could be better flushed out in a future paper.

[6] For readers interested in development, methods, or how-to's of Salish art, I recommend works by Oliver Wells, "S'abadeb, the Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists," published by the University of Washington Press (2008), or the Coast Salish art blog page at the Burke Museum **http://www.burkemuseum.org/blog/coast-salish-art-style-meaning**.

therefore I chose to examine Coast Salish art broadly – from the historically traditional practices such as carving and weaving, to the more recent additions of drawing, painting, ceramics, and digital design. I quickly realized that there were underlying commonalities tying every Stó:lõ artists' work together, as far back as I could see, and that became more interesting to me than tracking siloed changes through time.[7]

Next, I will summarize some of the history of Coast Salish art (specifically examining the Stó:lõ context) during and after European contact,[8] although I will be focussing primarily on more recent developments within this context. I will be using the terms 'traditional' and 'contemporary' to differentiate between artistic approaches within the Stó:lõ context,[9] although I acknowledge that these terms are debatable and do not accurately represent the understanding and place of art in the Stó:lõ community. Where I have deviated from this strategy, I hope the context explains itself. I will use the term 'historical' when referring to the way things were done before.[10] Ira Jacknis describes his use of the word 'traditional' as "…a cumulative handing down of shared forms and meanings," and this was the description that I kept in the back of my mind as I wrote because it seems to speak to both and Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding of this multi-faceted term.[11] I found it necessary to define the terms 'traditional' and 'contemporary' art because what my informants have shown me is

[7] Needless to say, there are more specific stories to be examined, for example, the connection between the development of a negative-space heavy painting style and how that connects to sculptural work, and the prevalence of round works on paper and the reference to spindle whorls.
[8] A few useful histories of the development of southern Coast Salish art (and the Coast Salish people) already exist and I recommend them for those interested in a *longue durée* view: "S'abadeb - "the Gifts" (University of Washington Press) which includes essays and pictures – the website is also an incredible resource http://www1.seattleartmuseum.org/exhibit/interactives/sabadeb/flash/index.html, as well as books and essays by Historians Ira Jackniss and Keith Carlson writing on the Coast Salish, Art Historians Paul Wingert and Bill Holm, and Anthropologists Franz Boas and Wayne Suttles.
[9] This timeframe is fairly random, I chose it because this is when it seemed to me that southern Coast Salish artists began to intentionally rediscover their traditional styles.
[10] This is an ambiguous time frame, but I apply this term implying its non-Indigenous understanding – "the past" – to encapsulate an Indigenous understanding that is outside of markable time.
[11] Ira Jacknis, "Towards an Art History of Northwest Coast First Nations," *BC Studies* no.135 (August 2002): 47.

that an artist can adhere to a traditional style in a contemporary way, or they can deviate completely from tradition – therefore, two strains of 'contemporary' Stó:lõ art exist. Again, the context should explain itself. Furthermore, in most cases I have used Coast Salish, Salish, and Stó:lõ interchangeably when referring to the people of the lower Fraser watershed, because all terms generally apply. From what I understand, historically there is not a definably specific Stó:lõ style, it is part of the Central Coast Salish style. Some artists have their own way of referring to their people and hopefully the context provides clarity as to whom they are referring.

Art is difficult to situate in non-Indigenous histories on Indigenous history. Indigenous art seems to have landed in the jurisdiction of anthropologists and art historians even though it itself is a form of cultural memory – it is often used to carry history and stories. Ira Jacknis, an American anthropologist, labels 1770-1870 as the "traditional" period in the art history of northwest coast First Nations.[12] Jacknis describes pre-contact art as "…created for ceremonial display at potlach feasts. Much of it was covered with emblematic animal designs, which were inherited and owned as ancestral privileges […] These art styles had reached a high point by the time of European contact in the 1770s."[13] He defends his "traditional" label as useful from an external perspective in terms of the "time between first European contact to the beginning of systematic anthropological artifact collection in the 1870s."[14] He claims that this first century of collecting resulted in notable changes in Coast Salish art production, particularly the development of art for tourism/trade, and the introduction of blankets from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC).[15]

[12] Jacknis, "Towards an Art History," 47. Jacknis' article does appear to fall into the persistent penchant of lumping all Pacific coast Indigenous groups together under the "northwest" banner and then describing only the art of the most northern of the Northwest nations.
[13] Ibid., 47.
[14] Ibid., 48.
[15] Artist Laura Weelaylaq explained the tension between the terms "traditional" and "contemporary" relating to Salish art in a way that acknowledges the complexity. She says that "...when you're learning to discover things that interest you, it's important to look at things that went before you, […] to give you a frame of reference so that you

Franz Boas, in his 1897 paper entitled "Decorative Art of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast", discusses how the primary purpose of the art of the North Pacific Coast was to decorate practical objects – and how the artist is almost always limited by the shape of the material that he is working with.[16] Granted, Boas was not speaking about the Stó:lõ specifically – his search for the "purely aboriginal" took him north to the Kwakwaka'wakw instead, whom he considered less affected by Europeanization[17] – but as Stan Greene, a Stó:lõ artist, will demonstrate further along, this resonates for the Stó:lõ as well. Boas' observation sets the stage nicely for a discussion on the revival of Coast Salish artwork because we are now in a time where artists are not constrained by materials – this poses a whole series of new questions. But I also have to disagree with Boas. Where Boas sees the materials as limiting, I am under the impression that artists see something to be pulled out of a material, rather that wrestled into.

Paul Wingert, an art historian informed by anthropologists Franz Boas and Marian Smith, placed sculpture (his focus, but could also be extended across mediums) into three categories – religious, social, and decorative – which could also be classified as ceremonial and utilitarian (both categories also being decorated). He tried valiantly to connect various marginal art styles between Salish groups to discover the origin of specific styles, which seems almost a hopeless task. From Carlson's work, it is clear that the Stó:lõ (and Coast Salish generally) migrated, traded with, and intermarried with other Indigenous groups creating a network that art styles also moved through. Wingert's hypothesis, based on the examination of old sculptures both in situ and in museum collections, was that the origin of the oldest styles is up-river [Fraser] as opposed to from the coast – he suggested that the Duwamish people may be the single

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can be inspired by those other people's actions. So that's not a tradition. What that is is that's looking at other people's thoughtfulness and by learning from their thoughtfulness, and that can be both contemporary and traditional."[15] Therefore, Sto:lo art can be traditional *and* contemporary, authentic *and* aesthetic, private and public. Jacknis noted that the "traditional" period ended with the beginning of "systematic anthropological artifact collection in the 1870s"[15] but already here we can see that perhaps these anthropologically imposed timelines do not fit with a Sto:lo understanding of what is "traditional."

[16] Franz Boas. "The Decorative Art of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast," *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* vol.9 (1897), 123.

[17] Ibid., 55.

originating centre for the Salish style.[18] He also mentioned that the two fundamental traditions – geometric and naturalistic – while both present in the art styles of the Pacific Coast, may have come from two different areas, suggesting both the Puget Sound area and the Fraser River, but unfortunately, he did not investigate this further.[19] Wingert published his book in 1949 and wrote: "It is unfortunate that Salish culture had begun to disintegrate and, in fact, had all but disappeared in many ways, before scientists had a chance to record those aspects which bear upon the meaning of their sculptures.[20]To me this says that Wingert did not see the Coast Salish people as able to carry their own culture forward.

Keith Thor Carlson's *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time* provides a strong foundation on which to build some comprehension of the complex history and culture of the Stó:lõ people. The Stó:lõ people have a history of resilience and adaptability which has enabled them to overcome incredible obstacles. Carlson discusses the smallpox epidemic of 1782 and the strength of the community in building itself back up, as well as the cultural implications (ex. status changes, migration, intermarriage). Also, he maps the effects of the fur trade beginning around the 1820s, the Fraser River gold rush in 1858, repressive government policies, the establishment of reserves, the arrival of missionaries. And on it goes. Without an understanding of the historic resiliency of the Stó:lõ, it would be easy to assume that any cultural expression was dead and buried after the incredible onslaught of trials and tribulations. I believe that the Stó:lõ peoples' resiliency and adaptability is reflected in their art. As I read through Carlson's book, I thought about art objects (ceremonial and utilitarian) moving and evolving as the people moved and evolved. I thought about how things change, and yet, how they stay the same.

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[18] Paul Wingert, *American Indian Sculpture: A Study of the Northwest Coast*. (NY: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1949), 119.
[19] Wingert, *American Indian Sculpture,* 119.
[20] Wingert, *American Indian Sculpture,* 6.

From October 2008 to March 2010, an exhibition showcasing Coast Salish work through time to present day traveled to the Seattle Art Museum, The Heard Museum, and the Royal British Columbia Museum. The exhibition "catalogue" and accompanying website are incredible resources for tracing the historic, cultural and social context of Coast Salish art. This book contains essays and photos, interviews, and stories that enhance settler and, I assume, Indigenous, understanding, or 'thingification' of what Coast Salish art is.[21] It not only discusses how non-Indigenous understandings of and practices toward Indigenous art have changed through time, but it is itself an example of a new way of talking about Indigenous art: that is, in conversation with Indigenous artists.

Wayne Suttles's developed an interest in Coast Salish art after identifying what he calls a "denigration and misinterpretation of [Coast Salish art] in works current when I was a student and beginning to teach in mid-century."[22] In examining the writing of other anthropologists, Suttles came to the conclusion that his discipline might be at partial fault for this, saying: "It seemed to me at the time that Coast Salish art was marginalized and misinterpreted."[23] Statements saying or implying that Coast Salish art was not real Northwest Coast art – it simply reflected some Northern influence, or was merely an imitation, or that all Coast Salish art portrayed guardian spirits (an observation from Marian Smith specific to the Puyallup) were to Suttles myths perpetuated by anthropologists that hindered the recognition of Coast Salish art. Other reasons that Suttles noted which could account for this lack of recognition were that there were fewer examples of it than northern art in museum collections, so "there was less to

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[21] lessLIE critiqued these designations, this collective terminology, during a Burke Museum panel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSZHHPReGhw&t=3514s

[22] Wayne Suttles, "The Recognition of Coast Salish Art," in *S'abadeb, The Gifts*: *Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists*, ed. Barbara Brotherton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 65.

[23] Ibid., 56.

say about it." Suttles suggested that the reasons for this lack of representation were likely historical and cultural: that earlier European exploration and collection on the northern coast resulted in the development there of art produced to sell, that the northern peoples had a tradition of producing art for public display whereas the Coast Salish had art which was reserved for ceremonial purposes and were not for public display – their ceremonies and cultural practices were kept private. Also, he speculated that earlier white settlement in Coast Salish territory on the one hand may have spurred on a quicker loss of their trades as they were replaced by trade goods, but on the other hand may have provided protection against government and church control. Carlson's careful work digs further into the private nature of the Stó:lõ , discussing the complex *sx̱wó:yx̱wey* lineage and the private Winterdance ceremonies.[24] In contrast, the deliberately dramatic masks and dances of the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw, for example, were for public display,[25] and proved to be much more captivating to anthropologists who were not allowed access to Stó:lõ private ceremonies. In fact, *sx̱wó:yx̱wey* masks are not even allowed to be publicly displayed.[26]

Beyond the impacts of increasing white settlement in their territory, the Stó:lõ , along with First Nations nation-wide, faced increasing restrictions from the government and the church. Carlson and others document the potlach ban in 1885, the repression of cultural expression, the removal of children from their homes to residential and industrial schools[27] from around 1888 to the 1940s, and in the Sixties' Scoop. The effects of these policies and prejudices continue to impact First Nations people in

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[24] Carlson, *Power of Place*, 68-71.
[25] U'mista Cultural Centre, *The Masks at U'mista* http://archive.umista.ca/masks_story/en/ht/masks01.html
[26] Due to time constraints, I could not adequately engage the topic of *sx̱wó:yx̱wey* masks. A more in-depth study warrants its own paper.
[27] One such school being the Coqualeetza Home/Industrial Institute. Most of the research completed for this paper was completed on the now reclaimed site of this school.

countless ways, and the clear impact on art production will be discussed by my informants. The 1970s saw the beginnings of a reclamation of cultural heritage. Reconnecting to ancestral art styles was one of the ways that this process of reclamation happened. Stan Greene[28] was one of the key figures in the revival of southern Coast Salish art in the 1970s. I asked him where the Salish design elements came from, and he said: "All I know and all I understand from the design, is that it comes to us from the beginning of time. The Creator put us here and he gave us everything we need."[29] He went on to say that:

> …the oldest pieces are made in stone design […] it's an evolved art, but the basics come from long long ago. But, they remain true and it doesn't matter if you are from… as long as you are Coast Salish, if you look at the artifacts from Nanaimo, the northern part of our people, to Victoria, to the Vancouver area, to the lower mainland, down to Seattle, to Skokomish, to Neah Bay, and if you look at the old artifacts, they all remain to be true to be very similar in style and design. And that's just the way that our people did these things.[30]

Stan lived with his grandparents in Chehalis and suggests one set of Stó:lõ teachings that he learned from them. In describing what he knows of the development of Salish art through time, particularly what was done before the Europeans came, Stan described "…rattles, *sx̲wó:yx̲wey* masks, posts, grave houses, house posts, spindle whorls...burial boxes...[…] *Siyá:m*. To be, to have anything carved, you had to be rich, because you had to pay the carver whatever the carver wanted, whatever you were going to offer him [...]. The hunting tools that they used, the fishing tools that they used […] mat creasers, things that the ladies would use: spindle whorls was one of them, mat creasers, the carvers made these things, because nothing was bought before, everything was made." [31] If you did not have these things (such as a canoe) you were poor.

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[28] Greene was trained in the Tsimshian style at the 'Ksan School of Native Art in Hazelton, BC.
[29] Stan Greene, interview with the author, June 1, 2017 [00:27:29].
[30] Ibid., [00:28:27].
[31] Ibid., [00:49:49].

Stan is now a teacher of the Salish style[32] and said that he always encourages his students to

> …look at the old pieces, go to the museums, look in the books, punch on your internet and punch out Salish art and it'll all come up in front of you. I couldn't do that when I was learning, I had to go to museums and do a lot of leg work. And I didn't have anybody to teach me, but I knew northern style, and I thought, there must be a way because I kept seeing the designs re-duplicated in all the different animals, and I figured that there's no ovoids, there's a oval shape, there's u-shapes but they're different than the northern style that I learned, there's s-shapes, there's crescents, there's parallel lines, there's circles, and I figured out this is how you do the head of a man, and this is how I'll do the wings and the tail, following in the design of the old peoples art style, and I broke it down, and I did the work…[33]

As Stan indicated, the common design elements of the southern Coast Salish style are u-shapes and split u-shapes, ovals, crescents, pulled crescents (also called trigons), parallel lines (and/or chevrons) and s-shapes. There are no form lines binding the whole piece together, there are no traditional colours – often pieces were left their natural colour: white wool, and red or yellow cedar (in comparison, the northern groups, particularly the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw, are known for their dramatic use of red and black). People are often depicted with wide, round faces with broad brows and a wavy brow line. The style is often characterized as more simple and realistic than the northern styles.[34] Negative space is almost more important than positive space – this is likely a result of newer art mediums being rooted in the carving style. As well, 2-dimensional forms – high relief – are common in sculpture, as opposed to round shapes – 3-dimensional – such as the commonly accepted understanding of the totem pole. The central design element is the drop of water and ripple, or pebble in the pond.[35] A very simple description of the shape itself is such: a central circle with a crescent and/or trigon cradling each side. Carrielynn Victor describes this important design this way: "Imagine for a second that this is water, and you have a stone and you cast this stone into the water and there's this ripple effect. This ripple effect is you, it's me. It's

[32] Greene uses the term 'Salish' to describe his maternal ancestry – his mother is from Chehalis, his father is Niimipuu from Chief Joseph.
[33] Stan Greene interview [00:09:28].
[34] These descriptions were collected from the oral interviews with my informants: Jared Deck, Bonny Graham, Stan Greene, Terry Horne, Nikki LaRock, Rocky LaRock, and Laura Weelaylaq.
[35] Bonny Graham referenced the drop of water and ripple in our interview on May 26, 2017, and Carrielynn Victor referred to pebble in the pond in her REDx Talk: "What I Know Now" October 10, 2015.

our actions, our thoughts. We cast this stone into the pond, into the water, and it moves. It doesn't just move in one direction, it moves, it bounces off things, it comes back. And it helps me visually to understand cause and effect, reciprocity, and respect."[36]

It is easy to understand the design elements listed above as recognizable shapes, but there is a spiritual aspect to these designs that adds weight to their use in a work of art. Laura Weelaylaq spoke to this in our conversation saying that these "anthropological terminologies" – 'northwest coast principles,' or 'principles of northwest coast Indian art' – have separated objects from their spirit.[37] Carrielynn describes some of the design elements in this way: the "trigon" is earth, and two trigons facing each other is the heavens. The "Ancestral eye" is a circle with a trigon on either side. It reminds Stó:lõ people that "…so long as we are following the ways and the practices of our ancestors, we will be looked after." She says that it reminds the people that they do not need to look back in fear, they have their ancestors watching their backs.[38] Stan Greene describes Salish artists as historians – they helped to carry the teachings.[39] Carrielynn describes art as more than decoration, it is a "visual bridge between our world and the spirit world" and it depicts the relationship between the spirit and the land. She says that there are messages for the people within every aspect of the design, and "Essentially, art is an important part of our language. Art is holding the laws and the history within it."[40]

With this in mind, I would say that in contrast to the set of rules that govern northern Coast Salish art – as outlined in Bill Holm's book on Northwest Coast Salish art (such as the lineform)[41] – the

[36] Victor, "What I Know Now," [8:50].
[37] Laura Weelaylaq interview [01:13:10].
[38] Victor, [00:08:00].
[39] Stan Greene interview [00:38:24].
[40] Ibid., [00:04:40].
[41] I have heard two perspectives on Bill Holm's work – one side thinks that artists have become too dependent on Bill Holm's work and accept is as gospel truth, when there is more to the story, while the other cites Bill Holm as a critical influence in the revival of Northwest Coast Salish art.

southern Salish style is less rigid. [42] Instead of rules, I would describe the approach to Coast Salish art as respect-based. As Stan said, these designs come from the Creator, so they must be respected. He says: “I'm very fussy for the Salish. If you're going to do it, do it good. Don't mix it up. Because I do styles, I do northern style, and I tell the people "don't mix it up, don't water it down, to be [in Halq'méylem] to be true to our old people."[43] I think about Nikki LaRock, a contemporary artist, who decorates anything she can get her hands on. She describes herself as un-traditional (she never studied what Coast Salish art was), but very spiritual, and her art always comes from a vision or a dream, including what the material should be. Barbara Brotherton, curator of Native American Art at the Seattle Art Museum and author of the book *S’abadeb, The Gifts*, suggests in the book that Duncan carver Simon Charlie’s artwork “…issued from his deep knowledge of the language, history, oral traditions and ceremonial practices of his Cowichan people rather than from copying older examples of the art forms.”[44] Clearly there are different ways to connect to culture and contemporary artists are finding what fits for them.

Contrary to what Stan’s teachers in ‘Ksan said, carving was practiced by the Coast Salish. Instead of totem poles, house posts or grave posts were carved. Stan describes these “Salish poles” as a:

> Representation of the people. A lot of the time they’d carve their stories, they’d carve the individuals. A lot of the poles that were up in our territories were representing individuals – these leaders. And we have names in our people from the beginning of time. Some names are passed down from the beginning of time. Some names are passed down, are made for these individuals, and today there’s contemporary names because a lot of them are lost […]. And all the time as I say, as I mentioned on the longhouse they would carve, and they represented the leader, the *siyá:m*. Today they have chiefs, they have elected chiefs. They weren’t that way before, they were *siyá:m*, leaders of each of the families were the *siyá:ms*. And they were the ones that a lot of times we’re talking about in these stories. And a lot of them are coming from the beginning of time. And sometimes they would carve additions added to those carvings. Maybe they were fishermen, they would show these things on there – maybe they were a great hunter. Maybe they had this crest for them – that was always one that they use. We have different crests. They talk about us as if we had no family crests before. And my family, some of the families that understand their ways, have ties and know their crests. They were claimed by them. But somebody decided

[42] Stan Greene references this strict approach when recounting his time training as a carver in the Tsimshian style at ‘Ksan.
[43] Stan Greene interview [00:17:07].
[44] Fournier, “’Coast Salish Revival’,” *Galleries West* (May 23, 2015).

> one time that we don't have crests. But, and we have individual crests also, personal crests. So we use those also.[45]

Talking about totem poles, carver Terry Horne says that "...it's just a mix because when everything was banned, things were gotten back and there were carvers from other regions and they would come and they would teach people and that's how they came to be in this area. It's kind of, it's like...it's just a way to get back, it's not traditional. You can incorporate Coast Salish designs into totem poles, but it's not traditional..."[46] Terry himself has carved a wide variety of poles, one included a penguin, a python, and a whale, so clearly there is room for creativity and personal expression.[47]

Historically, material availability was central to Coast Salish art. Common materials available were cedar (red and yellow), and stinging nettle, mountain goat wool, and woolly dogs' wool for weaving. Red and yellow cedar were also used for carving practical objects, including mat creasers, spindle whorls, wool brushes, ladles, baskets, hats, and robes, as well as ceremonial objects such as *sx̲wó:yx̲wey* masks and rattles. Weaving was one of the first crafts to nearly disappear, but also one of the first to return. Blankets were worn in ceremonies by important people and were given away at potlaches – Salish blankets were signs of wealth and status. Historically, these blankets were woven on a one-, or two-bar loom and were made of mountain goat hair that was collected from the mountains, or from the hair of the domesticated woolly dogs that were bred for this purpose.[48] HBC blankets, introduced around the 1820s were easier to obtain than the incredible amount of labour that went into weaving Salish blankets. Oliver Wells, the son of a settler in the Sardis area, and a farmer and amateur historian in his own right, was interested

[45] Stan Greene interview [00:45:20].
[46] Terry Horne, interview with author [00:05:39].
[47] Common figures represented on Salish poles (house posts) are mink and otter as they represent the first man and woman who came down into the valley with X̲ex̲á:ls. Stan Greene interview [00:43:24].
[48] Oliver Wells, *Salish Weaving, Primitive and Modern*, Published by Oliver N. Wells, Sardis, BC, 1969.

in the Stó:lõ people, and was instrumental in the revival of, and development of Salish weaving in the area. In his helpful book on Coast Salish Weaving, Wells describes meeting Mary Peters and how she maintained the knowledge of Salish weaving. At the time of their meeting, she was weaving rugs with scrap material as woolly dogs had gone extinct and Salish people were no longer collecting mountain goat hair. Wells added sheep to his farm and asked Mary Peters to weave using sheep's wool. She agreed, and produced a blanket with a Canada Goose design.[49]

Keeping in mind the notes that have been pieced together above regarding the historic Salish style, we can now examine how Salish art looks today, particularly art by Stó:lõ artists. I will explain what I found in my interviews, but I must also stress that this is only a small piece of the picture. Historically, Salish art was carving and weaving (including basket-making[50]). Stan Greene describes this time after the potlach bans have been lifted, residential schools have been closed, and First Nations are reviving their culture as "free" - free to learn your language, practice your art, wear your traditional clothing. But, some of the Stó:lõ[51] artists I spoke to saw the "traditional" methods as confining or restricting. Bonny Graham shared what she thought about this saying "…because I'm Stó:lõ, is there a rule and a regulation that confines me? I believe that art is an expression and just like anything, things change and adapt, and you want to hold on to those traditions, but there are things that are just your own nature of how you

[49] As told by Rena Point Bolton to Brian Thom, http://www.web.uvic.ca/~bthom1/Media/pdfs/ethnography/ARTISTIC.htm.
[50] Again, due to space constraints, I could not adequately discuss weaving (cedar or wool) – this topic also warrants its own specific engagement.
[51] By this I mean artists who are Stó:lõ people, as some artists I spoke to did not identify themselves as Stó:lõ, or Salish, artists.

interpret something and that makes the art in itself."[52] She describes the connection between historically traditional and contemporary Salish art as: " ... more of telling a story. I guess ultimately what all the artwork is, is meant to tell as story, no matter what it is – even if it's a logo or if it's a design. Generally, there's a story that it's based on."[53]

And of course, not only were things lost, but things were added – western artistic styles and western artists notions about what art is what artists are etc. Stan would go to the Museum of Anthropology to research. He said:

> …I told them (MOA) who I was and I told them what I wanted to do. So they let me go in after hours and I'd go into the private collections below and I'd look at the pieces and I studied on the spindle whorls, and I looked at the *sx̱wó:yx̱wey* masks, and the [in Halq'emeylem] rattle that we use. And I'd see the design on them. And I didn't have nobody to ask – I would take pictures of them and I'd take them to the elders in the valley and I would ask them, I'd show them a picture of these pieces and I would say "what does this mean to you? What does this represent?" And then they'd look at it and say "I'm sorry Stan, I don't know." This was in the late '70's. And... they said I'm sorry, I wasn't taught about that. And so all of the elders that were alive in the late '70's couldn't answer my questions. There was one man that was doing Salish when I started, his name was Simon Charlie from Duncan. He's passed away now. And he was doing a mixed version of Salish art – some of the cuts from what we do, and some of it was a mixture of the northern people, and his own style. And there was one other man that did some work, mostly for jewellery, his name was Rod Modeste. And he was from Duncan too. And those were the two that I'd seen anybody trying to do Salish. There was carvers, there was carvers here in the valley, in the States, in Vancouver, but they were doing a made-up version, their own individual style. And the people around the area they were, they were pretty stubborn about it too. I'd show them my work and I'd try to show them my prints, and then they would say, this is how my uncle made a eagle, and I'd say ok, […] but when I look at things that aren't, that don't have any history I call it 'mongrel' - it's a made-up version - if you take too many breeds and you put it into a dog, you get a mutt, and that's the way that people do.[54]

Does that mean that no "new" mediums are permitted?

Jared Deck of Tzeachten is a self-taught artist. Growing up, he copied the art that he saw around him in the homes of family members and what he saw in books. Initially, drawn to the northern style,

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[52] Bonny Graham interview [00:10:51].
[53] Ibid., [00:38:24].
[54] Stan Greene interview [00:06:37].

Jared did not connect with it. As he developed as an artist, he began to seek out a Salish style, which he now prefers, stating that "…it's closer to my heart."[55] He cites Terry Horne, Susan Point, and Chemainus (Salish) carvers Luke and John Marston as inspiration and partially responsible for his appreciation of the Salish style. Jared does most of his work in pencil, markers, watercolour and acrylic paint, as well as some digital work. When we spoke about his thoughts on traditional and contemporary art, he said "…do what feels right to you, but if you're doing that style of artwork, maybe go back and learn a bit of the history and stuff like that, and, or at least, you know, acknowledge it maybe, but if you don't want to, I don't know, maybe you don't have to? I don't know, right! (laughs) so, it's yah. It's hard to say."[56] In his own work, he feels comfortable acknowledging the traditional styles while also developing his own style. He says: "...there's the traditional element, right, with you know you see the stuff that was done hundreds of years ago, and then you try to sort of emulate that or copy it, but you want to make it your own, so I guess that's kinda how it develops and morphs....and the tools at hand have advanced, right, and then, people have their own take on it and they just kinda go from there, and it just, kind of develops into what it is."[57] We also spoke about how he has seen Salish art change over time. He said that the Salish style has become more stylized or has been expanded as people have become more creative and mediums have opened up more expressive opportunities. He says: "…with the traditional stuff you can only do so much, but if you take it a little bit in a different direction, you know, the limitations are endless, I guess. But you still, still kind of keep the roots in there, so it makes it what it is."[58]

This theme of innovation came up often in my interviews. Terry Horne, a carver from a family of carvers, said: "Because everything was taken away, there aren't people to teach all these things, and

[55] Jared Deck, interview with the author, May 24, 2017 [00:09:21].
[56] Ibid., [00:22:40].
[57] Ibid., [00:11:35].
[58] Ibid., [00:12:30].

going to school in Chilliwack, I learned more about Haida, Mohawk, and things like that, instead of about my own people, the Stó:lõ people."[59] His father[60] was self-taught – he learned by going to museums and borrowing books from the library – his father's older brother learned from the late Simon Charlie in Duncan. Terry said he learned more from books than from his dad, from drawing, and cites Bill Reid as one of his influences (he met him when he was a child). He describes his style as Contemporary Coast Salish and said: "My work has evolved from everything I've learned a long the way. My style, I don't think you could call it Coast Salish before, but I'm moving more into a traditional Coast Salish but it's still a mix of everything that I've learned over the years."[61] To Terry, getting back to a true Coast Salish style is important because, as a Coast Salish carver, he wants to leave a good example of the Coast Salish style for his people. Within that, though, he says, look at traditional carvings and use traditional design elements, but make it your own.[62]

In Chehalis, carver Rocky LaRock also spoke of innovation and evolution in Salish art. He says there is room for other mediums besides carving and weaving – personally, he gets bored seeing the same things over and over. Rocky, a cultural teacher at the Chehalis school, said: "They teach in the schools that you don't have to follow anybody - you go with what you want, what you desire and you see who's with you. It's not up to anybody else what you make or how you make it or what it means..."[63] Rocky himself was trained as a carver by his brother-in-law, Ron Austin Sr. who had completed his training at the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art in Hazelton, BC. He describes his practice this way: "I'm Coast Salish because I'm Chehalis, which is where my mom's from, and that's it. Other than that, contemporary suits me just fine. Whatever that means. It means I do what I want, when I

[59] Terry Horne interview [00:11:35].
[60] Francis Horne.
[61] Terry Horne interview [00:03:23].
[62] Terry Horne interview, [00:12:11].
[63] Rocky LaRock, interview with the author, May 29, 2017 [00:40:55].

want, how I want, why I want. Period. I don't follow no more new ways, I don't take orders or directions..."[64] Rocky is a multi-disciplinary artist, but his main focus is carving and he is known for bold work. He shared in his interview about the way that his initiation into the longhouse changed his life and his art practice. He said: "I just learned to develop and create my own – what I like and what I see, and what I feel, at the time that I'm making it. Sometimes I'll have a dream. Dreams have a lot to do with what I create now. 'Cuz I do a lot of ceremonial work now for the people, my people. And my initiation into the longhouse couple dozen years ago had a big part in my art as well. Now I have to be careful of what I make, how I make it."[65] In regard to the evolution of the Salish style, something that he contributes to in pursuit of his own style, Rocky says that "...as you grow, as evolution takes place, change happens everywhere in everything. And with the world we live in today, with the past, there's a… there seems to be [searches for words] clashing and butting heads with rules and guidelines and regulations, and culture, and who we are, as to who we used to be, and just changing with the times I think is what's changing people. ...you can't find one person around that's full-blooded Salish...everything has been watered down."[66] My sense was that Rocky found this to be freeing. A "rebel without a cause,"[67] Rocky used hand tools to carve for most of his career, but now works primarily with power tools and loves it. As well, he now searches YouTube for inspiration, tips, and tricks.

Nikki LaRock from Yakweakwioose, a multi-disciplinary artist working with anything from hair to Harley-Davidson's, shares a similar independent approach to Rocky LaRock, who is also her father. She went through what she describes as a "spiritual ceremony" and prayed for a gift – the gift she received

[64] Rocky LaRock interview, [00:42:07].
[65] Ibid., [00:04:28].
[66] Ibid., [00:43:24].
[67] Called such by his wife, Sarah, during our interview.

was art.[68] As with many of the artists I spoke with, Nikki started drawing at a young age, but she did not research the traditional Salish style. As a result, she described her work as "Not your typical kind of designs at all – it's very, very different."[69] Nikki also said:

> ... I never studied Coast Salish art so I don't know the rules of the art, I just go with what I feel. I don't follow rules very well (laughs). But, a lot of people say that my, designs are […] an Island style. Some of my shapes and stuff are from the Island, but I'm like okay well, awesome. Whatever. But people are all going to have their own opinion of the art, and people are entitled to their opinion, […] I don't take anything to heart so if […] people like it, they do, if they don't then they don't. I just do it because it helps me. And I just, I bring out messages through my art.[70]

Bonny Graham is a graphic artist with a background in newspapers. She has a love for fonts, and has for many years been producing works that blend art and language together. She has created an innovative and beautiful Salish-style font for the Halq'emeylem letters. She describes her work as "…simple but trying to stay true to the traditional shapes."[71] She wanted people to be able to look at a word and know where it came from so she tied the letters to tradition and heritage. Halq'emeylem is an oral language historically, and Bonny was apprehensive about her artwork being based around its written form. Since the residential schools, though, the verbal language was not being passed on. She spoke with her elders, looked at the traditional forms, and tried to do her work in a good way, and it was positively received. Bonny demonstrated to me how art can be a vessel for language revitalization and how innovation can be respectful.

Weaving is often referred to as the 'traditional' Salish art.[72] During the time I spent at the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre, I heard stories from elders and weavers about reviving the

[68] Nikki LaRock, interview with the author, May 18, 2017 [00:04:00].
[69] Ibid. [00:04:42].
[70] Nikki LaRock interview [00:04:59].
[71] Bonny Graham interview [00:10:06].
[72] I am particularly indebted to Patricia Raymond-Adair, Julie Malloway, Yvonne Joe, and Dianna Herrling at the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre for their wisdom, and their willingness to teach me about Salish weaving, as well as teaching me some of the basic techniques.

traditional approaches to Salish weaving while sprinkling innovations throughout the whole process. From what I understand, weaving has always welcomed innovation. Loom styles changed over time, technology changed, materials changed, and patterns changed. And yet, it remains Salish weaving. Weaving specifically reminds me of the resilience and adaptability of the Stó:lõ people – while maintaining its significance, Salish weaving was brought forward through time, was nearly lost, but now is being revived and is contributing to the reconnection to Stó:lõ culture. It takes a large group to make a ball of yarn. When the women weavers of the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre get wool right off the sheep it must be cleaned, carded, spun, and maybe dyed before it can be used. It is messy and hard work, but it is better together. Everyone has their role and all ages can participate. When it is done, the weaving returns to the community as blankets for new babies, as seat covers to bring comfort, as blankets to honour chiefs, or as income to take care of the family. This demonstrates the reciprocity that is inherent in the Salish culture – to give, and to receive, and to take care of everything that belongs to them.

Carrielynn says that they are taught to "Take one shape and move it around and observe it from different angles and find where we fit."[73] To me this speaks to the openness to interpretation and evolution of the southern Coast Salish style. Nowadays, carvings that are seen in public space are more gestural than cultural. Stan Greene describes the proliferation of totem poles and now welcome figures this way:

> Welcome figure was more of a gesture from today, but all of the people were represented in the carvings. Among the Salish people, whenever you travel […] they represented on the poles who they were – their stories on their poles – and they stood and the entrances to the longhouses because the entrances were facing the river, facing the water, the ocean, wherever they came from, and the people, whenever they came, they could see these and they knew who these were the people that lived here. But today because of the people they wanted to use something gestured, so an outreached hand, I think up by Bella Coola, there's the Salish peoples, there's an old piece up there of a welcome figure, and so that's one of the areas where it came from. And a lot of the things that people do were because of when the European people came here, and they

[73] Carrielynn Victor, "What I Know Now," [00:06:30].

> made these things that were a tie-in of the two cultures. Things that the people wanted, things that…hanging on to our old…but I've done a lot of welcome figures, and I don't appreciate mongrel art. We have our own style, there's no reason for our people to be uneducated. Before 1952 it was against the law to be native...before that...children were taken away, people were stripped of the culture...[74]

There are many push and pull factors in the Stó:lõ art community today. First of all, it was clear to me that there is tension between identities of being a Stó:lõ artist, and a Stó:lõ person who makes art. Secondly, Stó:lõ artists often have difficulty in the art market because the north coast art (Haida, Kwakiutl, Tlingit) is very dramatic and has been sought out and promoted more by collectors and galleries. Thirdly, a skilled craftsperson/artist, would traditionally have been taken care of by the community so they could devote their time to sharing and developing their craft. The village would provide them with food – everything they needed – because their contribution was reciprocal.[75] Practice has been disrupted by the capitalist economy, and there are also implications for how art is produced and even who can do it. Finally, there is a searching for past answers – many things have been lost over the generations of displacement and disenfranchisement and some questions may never be answered.

Even though there does seem to be an acceptance of doing your own thing, I can only assume that the boundaries (if there are any) have never been tested under the conditions experienced today. As an elder in his community, I wanted to know what Stan thought of the approach that some younger artists today have – where they acknowledge tradition, (or not) but do their own style. Stan said:

> No... I’ve seen a lot of contemporary artists work and I'm not happy with it. People look at something – a lot of the artists figure that they could make money off it if the do this. And they've done that. A lot of the artists, I thought that artists, ours were historians, carried the teachings, helped to carry the teachings, that's what a lot of my art was, there's stories in all of my artwork. If you look at that art, the pieces, you can see that they're Salish or they're Tsimshian (I do that style also). And I have to be careful to do it right because it's not mine, I don’t come from them, but they taught me and I've made a living selling them. And people want to learn, if they want to do their own, learn it then, learn it right. Don't just look at a piece and figure you know and try to sell this. You're watering it down too much. And it's not right. In time to come […] if nothing was

[74] Stan Greene interview [00:34:10].
[75] Stan Greene, Rocky LaRock, and Laura Weelaylaq all discuss this in their interviews.

> learned if nothing was studied about our people, they would look at this in a hundred years now and they look at the pieces and they'd say this is a Salish piece, and in reality it's not. Somebody, they came from the Stó:lõ territory, they're doing a mixed up version, what I mention: mongrel.[76]

The Marston brothers of Chemainus echo this sentiment. They say: "… the younger up-and-coming artists, they need to go back and do their research before they break out into their own style. Our art is a discipline, and yet it's not going to stand still. It has to evolve, and that's what the world is seeing with Coast Salish art today. It's our time."[77] On the other side, lessLIE, a Coast Salish artist from Duncan says that "…our culture, our art, is a reflection of who we are today," and says that it only makes sense to accept influences from North American visual culture.[78]

As an outsider to the Stó:lõ community, I was, and continue to be grateful for the willingness of artists within the community to share with me about their practice, their approach to their art practice, and their understanding of the broader place of art in their community. The conclusions I have drawn are my own, but have been informed by conversations with these artists, by listening to Stó:lõ artists of many generations, and by reading a variety of academic historical, anthropological, and curatorial sources.

From that place, I can perhaps provide two summarizing comments about what I have learned:

Everything in Stó:lõ (Salish) art means something – the designs, the figures, the material – everything tells a story. The designs will tell you about the artist – what they like, how they see the world and their place within their Salish identity. The figures will tell you who the piece is for – what they want the world to know about them. The material speaks to what materials were available locally and tells the history of the people themselves (ex. how things changed after contact with Europeans). As

[76] Stan Greene interview [00:38:24].
[77] Fournier, "'Coast Salish Revival'," *Galleries West* (May 23, 2015).
[78] Burke Museum, "Coast Salish Art in the 21st C" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSZHHPReGhw&t=3514s.

outsiders, we do not need to understand everything that Salish art says, but it can act as a visual language that could bridge cultural gaps between settlers and First Nations people.

Second, the art and artists of the lower Fraser watershed are a gift. Each artist has been specially tasked as culture and history carriers in their own way and in turn, are strengthening their communities with their practice. They are also a gift because the work is distinct, and beautiful and deserves recognition and celebration in its own right.

Today, Central Coast Salish art is gaining recognition as its own unique expression, instead of being buried under academic mis-labelling. In discussing Stó:lõ art with Stó:lõ artists, it is evident that not only have most scholarly engagements on the topic merely scratched the surface, but in fact, many have made incorrect assumptions. Stó:lõ artists, alongside ethnohistorian partners, will continue to play a critical role in the re-framing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of Central Coast Salish art.

Rocky LaRock said about art, that "…it's the past, it's the present, it's the future."[79] The work done by the artists of the 1970s, built on the foundations of the carvers and weavers of the past, has laid a foundation for artists today – not only in rediscovering traditional styles, but by demonstrating a respect for the ancestral ways and by being true to the spirit. Stó:lõ art, art that is done by a Stó:lõ person, art that contains certain designs that are unique to the Central Coast Salish and are different from the northern Northwest Coast style: however you define it, the art done in the lower Fraser watershed will continue to evolve and adapt as it has done through time by looking to the past, marking the present, and strengthening the people for the future.

[79] Rocky LaRock interview [00:28:56].

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